



## Episode 1,067: Peace Breaking Out and ISIS Defeated — or Is It?

Guest: Scott Horton

**WOODS:** I was reading this article by Patrick Cockburn about what he says the be the impending end to what he calls the barbarous wars in Iraq and Syria. And he says he spent — I'm reading this from the column: "I spent most of the last year reporting two sieges, Mosul in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria, which finally ended with the decisive defeat of Isis. This was the most important event in the Middle East in 2017, though people are already beginning to forget how dangerous the Isis caliphate was at the height of its power and even in its decline. Not so long ago, its 'emirs' ruled an area in western Iraq and eastern Syria which was the size of Great Britain and Isis-inspired or organized terrorists dominated the news every few months by carrying out atrocities from Manchester to Kabul and Berlin to the Sahara. Isis retains the capacity to slaughter civilians - witness events in Sinai and Afghanistan in the last few weeks - but no longer has its own powerful centrally organized state which was what made it such a threat."

So when I read that, I thought this was an interesting topic to talk to Scott about. So what I'd like to do is two things here. First, I want to get your assessment of what he just said about the dangers of ISIS when it was a state. And secondly, do you think that we are — I guess I have a whole bunch of questions, so let's just do one at a time. Let's do ISIS first. Is that a good assessment of the situation with ISIS, in that it really did constitute a threat, maybe not to the U.S., but to somebody? And secondly, that there is the prospect of everything really winding down now?

**HORTON:** Well, yeah. Okay, so first of all, Patrick Cockburn is absolutely the best, and that's why I know so much about everything, is because I read Patrick Cockburn, and everyone in your audience should read everything he writes. His brother Andrew is also an incredible author and journalist too, but Patrick covers the wars. And of course, if everybody had listened to Patrick, none of this would have ever happened. He was on my show and in *The Independent* writing for years, warning that Barack Obama's support for the jihad in Syria was leading to — already it was reenergizing the Sunni-based insurgency in Iraq. And then as I talked about it with him on my show, that western Iraq was basically wide open, ungoverned territory. And the al-Qaeda in Iraq group had started calling themselves the Islamic State of Iraq as far back as 2006. So luckily, the Iraqi tribal Sunni leaders had crushed them and marginalized them, but then Barack Obama came and took their side in Syria.

And so it was so obvious, and if you go back and check the archives in the run up for a year before the creation of the caliphate, Patrick Cockburn's on my show and every al-Qaeda expert I could get on the show to talk about this, as we covered what was going to happen. And we know now from the DIA report from 2012 that they knew this was going to happen

too, that this was a major danger, that ISIS would not just seize control of eastern Syria but they could seize control of western Iraq as well, which is exactly what happened. So then Barack Obama had to turn around and go, *Oh, gee, I don't know how in the world that happened, so now I have to take the side of the Iraqi Shia again and the Kurds again in order to crush them*, which, as Patrick Cockburn is explaining here, took three years from 2014 through '17. And then finally they did crush them as a state.

Now, to the second question and third question there – or yeah, whichever order – I think they might be more dangerous now. There's still at least thousands of these guys and, Lord knows, thousands of them have been killed. Maybe tens of thousands of them have been killed. But there's still thousands of these guys, and because they were the moderate, wonderful, good-guy rebels for years, the U.S. and – and I'm not sure; there are at least dozens of Americans who have gone to fight in the jihad in Syria, and I don't know where they are now. Maybe some of them have come home. And there are thousands of Europeans who have gone to fight and who have passports and who can get back into Europe now.

And so they may be much more dangerous as future sleeper cells. They don't even have to be literally sleeper cells. They could just come home and then decide in a couple of years that, *I want to go back to the fight and here I am in Belgium, so I'll just go back to the fight right here*, this kind of thing. These are now battle-hardened, really, traitors to the West. They were fighting on the side of al-Qaeda, but, ah, all our governments are traitors to the West too. So they have been supporting these guys.

So I think Patrick may be wrong about that. I love reading an optimistic Patrick Cockburn article, but I'm terrified that there are thousands of these guys who are now – This is just like at the end of the 1980s and the end of the war in Afghanistan. Well, what's going to happen to all of the jihadis when they come home? Well, they create al-Qaeda. And then after Iraq War II, what's going to happen to all the jihadis when they come home? Well, they're going to a war in Libya and Syria and America's going to take their side and lead to this crisis. And now so what happens when the Islamic State is crushed in Iraq and Syria? I don't know, but they're going home to wherever they came from.

And there's more of them now than ever. I mean, there were at the height of the Islamic State maybe 30,000 of these guys or 40,000. Patrick Cockburn, in fact, said even more. He was like, look, actually, at the height of their power, they're actually winning fights in this area, this area, this area, this area, and he was agreeing with the Kurds that they had at least 100,000 fighters at one point. Now, that doesn't mean all terrorists who'd be willing to go and wage war against the West forever, this kind of thing. But what's the remainder on that? What's the margin on that of future terrorists?

So as far as the war in Iraq and Syria winding down, I hope he's really right about that. I mean, it seems absolutely – well, not absolutely. It seems very clear to me that Donald Trump has cancelled CIA support for the terrorists in Syria. Round of applause, everybody. Dub that in there. And so he is out of the way or is trying to stay out of the way of the Russians, the Syrians, and the Iranians and Hezbollah killing off the last of the al-Nusra Front terrorists in the Idlib Province, for example. But at the same time, the military wants to occupy eastern Syria and back Kurdish separatists there in the creation of the separate Rojava state. So that could lead to a whole new crisis with Damascus. And at the same time, I mean, the Kurds have already lost Kirkuk, but there are those in America and in Israel who would

like to see the Kurds control Kirkuk and split off from Baghdad, which would lead to a war with Baghdad. But that's possible, coming up.

**WOODS:** Wow. Okay, so that really is quite different from what I'm reading in this column. I'll link to this column on the show notes page. I guess that's Episode 1,067, so [TomWoods.com/1067](http://TomWoods.com/1067). He says, just continuing on, "[T]here is a good chance the period of wars and emergencies that have battered Iraq for the last 40 years are coming to an end. There is no home-grown insurgency powered by foreign states in the offing." So he's just speaking here about Iraq specifically. "Beyond its borders, the northern tier of the Middle East between Iran and the Mediterranean, stretching through Iraq, Syria and Lebanon appears to be stabilizing." Anything to that?

**HORTON:** Yeah, I think overall that that's probably right. Again, we're talking – you know, the Islamic State is gone. They were roused out over the last three years. They were roused out of Fallujah, Tikrit, Ramadi, Mosul, and now Raqqa in eastern Syria, as well, which was their capital. So in other words, the Sunnis of western Iraq have been crushed again, but I think it's still a real open question as to what happens to them. Petraeus basically bribed them to stop fighting the Americans and on the promise that we're going to integrate you into the patronage system, so that you get your share of the oil money and you get jobs in the police and the security services and all of that. None of that ever happened. And the Maliki government, the Shiite supermajority, Dawa Party government that George W. Bush put in power there, they told the Sunnis, *Hey, we got Baghdad. Thanks to the Army and the Marine Corps, we got Baghdad, so you guys can go burn in the sun*. And like I said, they just left Sunnistan as an ungoverned space, basically, ripe for the taking by the Islamic State when they rolled in there.

So now that the Shia forces with the help of the United States have crushed the Sunni insurgency again in Iraq War III, what's to become of them? They're just going to have Shiite overlords sent from Baghdad up there to rule over them in Mosul and Ramadi and Fallujah? I don't think so. They're going to have to come to some kind of agreement, or we're going to go back to 2012-level violence, I guess, or you know, 2011-level violence where there's a constant, slow, roiling Sunni insurgency that has really nowhere to go. So if Baghdad doesn't want to cut them in, they're going to have nothing left to do except fight.

And by the way, this is another thing Barack Obama did. Everybody always says, *Oh, boo hoo, Barack Obama pulled the troops out of Iraq and that's why ISIS took over* – never mind the fact that he was on the side of the jihad in Syria and that's what really happened. And it is sort of true that if you'd had 50,000 American troops there, they might have been able to stop the march on Mosul. But I'm just saying that's kind of beside the point and it's begging the question, because why was the Islamic State even a threat to roll into Mosul in the first place, right? And part of the answer to that is, in the election of 2010, Allawi and his party won and they had the right to try to form the first government and the parliament. And Obama and the Iranians – and George W. Bush did the same thing previously – made a deal with the Iranians that no, we'll keep Maliki. And so Maliki's attitude was, as I said, Sunnis burn in the sun.

Well, who was Allawi? Allawi was a Shiite, but he was a Baathist, a former Baathist and member of Saddam's government. And he had worked for the CIA, and you might remember in 2003, he was the first – or pardon me. In 2004, he was the first sock puppet prime minister after Paul Bremer left town in Iraq War II. So the thing of it was he may have had a chance to

bridge the gap and say, *Look, you guys know me because I'm a Shia; you know me because I'm a Baathist. Let's see if we can come to some kind of power sharing arrangement, this or that.* And instead, Obama basically used his power and influence to maneuver and screw Allawi out of the chance to form the new government and leave Maliki in there. And that was just the worst thing that could have happened because Maliki's attitude, as always really representing the Iranian point of view, was we have the south and the east of the country. We don't want to conquer and rule Sunnistan; we just want to run off with all the land from Baghdad down to Kuwait and over to Iran. And that's what they did with George Bush's help.

**WOODS:** I've got some stuff I want to ask you about Iran, as it turns out. We'll do that after we thank our sponsor.

[Sponsored content]

Actually, Scott, before I ask you about Iran, one more — just a little bit, almost a throwaway line at the end of the Cockburn article. I'm going to join it midsentence. He says, "...[T]he invasion of Iraq in 2003 turned al-Qaeda into a mass movement and finally produced Isis, a militarized cult of demonic savagery." So is that the way you look at this? Even if we were to say it's a great victory; ISIS has been defeated in its current state, would you say, "Great, here's a thing that wouldn't have existed in the first place had there not been the previous interventions?"

**HORTON:** Right, yeah. It's just like that time we beat Hitler. Like, yeah, well, Wilson created him, so congratulations.

**WOODS:** Yeah, I mean, we're not shedding any tears that he's gone, but we're saying that you might have been able to avoid the whole situation in the first place.

**HORTON:** Yeah, Gary Bernstein, who ran the original CIA operation in Afghanistan in 2001, he admitted in 2016 — and he was the guy that complained seriously that Bush would not give him the Rangers and the Marines that he needed to get bin Laden at Tora Bora. And he said to Michael Hirsh in 2016 this whole terror war could have been over by the end of the year. It could have been over by New Year's 2002. There were only 400 of these guys, and the Air Force and the CIA and the Delta Force killed about half of them. And you know, they had a few more fighters with them. The Pakistanis arrested some. It was just bin Laden, Zawahiri, and a couple of dozen of their friends who escaped across the border into Pakistan. They were done. The war was won.

And then Michael Scheuer, who is more right-wing than anyone in this entire audience — and that's maybe saying something — he has said that invading Iraq was the hoped-for-but-unexpected gift to bin Laden. And this is a guy who, as a former CIA analyst and a right-wing nationalist, he literally does not believe that any other human on earth has a right to live, only Americans. His only interest is protecting Americans, fighting for Americans. He's the guy that gave Bill Clinton ten chances to kill bin Laden. And he said what you did by invading Iraq was you made Osama bin Laden's impossible dream come true.

I mean, this caliphate, where is this land that it took over? The land that was formerly ruled by the secular Sunni, basically fascist party, the Baathist Party? Saddam Hussein worshipped

only himself, shaved his chin every morning, wore a beret like a Frenchman. And America turned all of western Iraq into Chaos-stan, into Jihadistan.

And then like I say, it was such a brilliant stroke of luck that the Sunni Arab tribal leaders, by 2006 and '07, they were sick to death of the al-Qaeda guys, and they marginalized them badly, killed them. There were very few left. And that was just the luckiest thing in the world. George W. Bush turns western Iraq into Jihadistan, but then the local Sunnis go ahead and quash that. Phew. But then Obama comes and takes their side in Syria. My God. And then it's just been the slowest-motion train wreck since 2011.

I mean, your guys and my guys — you know, Phil Giraldi and Eric Margolis and Pepe Escobar and all these guys, they were saying in 2011 what was going on. Eric Margolis went to France in the summer of 2011. He came back and said French special forces are helping the terrorists on the ground in Syria right now. And he knows really powerful people there in the military and in the diplomatic corps. So we've known this was going on this whole time. And it's just, if lying us into Iraq War II was a slow-motion train wreck, then what is taking the side of al-Qaeda in Iraq and Syria right in front of everybody's face and then just saying, *No, they're moderate*, and then just doing it anyway?

**WOODS:** [laughing] All right, let's switch gears. Let's talk about Iran. I was just going to ask you about Trump's attitude toward Iran and whether it's a lot of sabre rattling or whether anything's going to come of it, but first, I guess in light of what's been going on, I've got to ask you about your impression is of what's going on in the streets over there. And is this in any way — do you think it's CIA-inspired? You can't know, of course.

**HORTON:** Yeah, I really don't know. I mean, the point of covert action, if they do it right, is that it's deniable. So I mean, obviously there are Americans and Israelis with a tremendous interest in trying to destabilize Iran, and we have reports from *The Times of Israel*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and a couple others about secret agreements decided this year between the Trump and Netanyahu governments, that they are going to step up covert action in Iran, etc. Other than that, I really can't say whether this has anything to do with that or not. I really don't know. I mean, in fact, I'm going to talk with Muhammad Sahimi a little bit later today, who's a friend of mine who's an Iranian expat who really knows about all this stuff very well, and see what he thinks of that.

But from what I'm understanding, it started out as a protest against price inflation, because the Iranian government, like every government on earth, only knows how to print money. And so they print money. And of course they're still under sanctions. The president had promised all this economic relief was going to come by submitting to the Americans and the nuclear deal, but very little of it really did come through for them, and it certainly didn't turn their entire economy around or anything like that.

And so the hardliners, the right-wing religious nuts were the ones — well, I don't know "nuts," but the powerful ones encouraged the protests at first, because they were against the more moderate president. But then it kind of blew up in their face, supposedly, ostensibly, is what I'm reading. And the protests spread, and the protests are very much against their rule. In fact, Rouhani, the president, he had released — I don't know if this was before or after, but he had released some documents that showed just how much the state paid all these religious leadership groups and all the graft, and this was stuff that had always been kept secret before. And so that had helped turn the protests against them.

Now, what's interesting is watching all of the worst Zionists who would love to see Israel and America carpet bomb all of Iran with H-bombs every day all of a sudden are the people who love and care about the people of Iran the most. *Oh, we stand with the lady protesters of Iran and all of this stuff – yeah, when we're not starving them to death with crippling sanctions and virtually outlawing the importation of chemotherapy medicine for their cancer that they're dying of. Other than that, oh, we love them just to death.* And they glom onto it, latch onto it, and just pretend – unless they know something I don't know. They just pretend to believe that, oh, see? Revolution is imminent. Right, yeah, just like every time there's a Tea Party protest against Obama, it signaled the virtual end of the American constitutional system and revolution. Remember that? I mean, why would we believe that, that some protests equal revolution?

And even if they clamp down violently – we saw it happen in 2009, they clamped down violently – they won. They're a state government. They have a massive army if it comes down to it. I don't know how massive, but certainly big enough to handle internal security needs. I don't think they're going to get a '53 revolution here. But of course, from the point of view of the anti-Iran hawks, if they can even help provoke a reaction against the protesters, a violent reaction by the government, then that's just another further notch on the path to regime change and an excuse to then bring up this as like a side issue of why to end the nuclear deal, which Trump apparently already wants to do and make matters worse.

**WOODS:** Right, so then that's – Let's have that be our last issues to – because I know we both have to run after all my computer and audio issues this morning. Welcome to 2018. But I did want to get your take on where things stand between the U.S. and Iran right now. This is clearly an area where Trump is much worse than Obama. But on the other hand, maybe it stays rhetorical, as it did with George W. Bush.

**HORTON:** Yeah, well, you know, we sure hope so. I mean, the problem is even George W. Bush knew a lot more about what was going on over there than Trump. I mean, at some point, anyway, he figured out a little bit more of this and started telling Cheney no and told Ehud Olmert, who was the prime minister of Israel then, no, we're not doing this. The thing is with Donald Trump is I think he has so little background knowledge of this that he's completely susceptible to propaganda. So there was this error he made when he was praising the actions of the government of Lebanon to the president of Lebanon and saying, *Yeah, you've been doing a great job fighting terrorism, fighting ISIS, fighting Hezbollah.* But it was Hezbollah that's part of the coalition government of Lebanon that had fought and defeated ISIS and driven them out. So he just has no idea what the hell he's talking about.

So if 500 Likudniks in a row say to him, "Iran is the leader of terrorism in the world," it's like a magic incantation or whatever. It doesn't matter that it's not true. It doesn't matter that Hezbollah's not a terrorist group; it's a mini state. It's like a state government in the Lebanon confessional system, basically. And they're the avowed enemies of ISIS. They just helped us, we just helped them defeat ISIS in Iraq War III, where this discussion started. We're fighting on their side again in Iraq. So if the Quds Force killing ISIS is terrorism, then the U.S. Air Force killing ISIS is terrorism, and terrorism doesn't mean anything anymore. Iran is not an enemy of the United States. Iran's biggest gain in the 21st century was when George Bush knocked off Saddam Hussein for them.

**WOODS:** Yeah, no kidding.

**HORTON:** And then he wasn't happy with that. He stayed and fought an eight-year war for them. And then look —

**WOODS:** All right —

**HORTON:** Wait, one more thing.

**WOODS:** Okay.

**HORTON:** Go back to why did Obama back the terrorists against Assad in Syria. As he told Jeffrey Goldberg in 2012 in *The Atlantic* magazine, this will be good to help bring Iran down a peg by overthrowing their last Arab allied state in the region. Well, it ended up backfiring and leading to the rise of the Islamic State, and as I said, Iraq War III, fought again on behalf of the Shia. And now we have Hezbollah and Iran on the ground in Syria helping mop this up. And now the neocons are freaking out and saying, *Oh my God, look, Iran has increased in power and influence*. But they are the ones who have caused this every single step of the way.

And so if you show me anybody who wants to hawk it up against Iran who it's not their fault for pushing us into Iraq War II and backing the terrorists in Syria, which blew up in their face so bad, then maybe I'll listen. But I can't find anyone like that. I can only find the guilty trying to start another fight to try to make up for the consequences of their last few.

**WOODS:** Scott, give me just 60 seconds on the claim that Iran is the biggest state sponsor of terrorism in the world. Is this just a question of how you define "terrorism," because wouldn't you think conniving at the situation in Yemen would by a rational definition constitute terrorism?

**HORTON:** Well, I mean, if you mean that they are supposedly backing the Houthis there —

**WOODS:** No, no, no. My point is that the U.S. has connived at that, but they're not called terrorists for it. So to some degree, it depends on how you define it.

**HORTON:** That's right. Yeah, as Bill Clinton once said, "terror" means killing and robbery and murder that is not sanctioned by a government.

**WOODS:** [laughing] Yeah. Right. Exactly.

**HORTON:** I even made a bumper sticker out of that. It was so just an out-of-the-mouths-of-criminals kind of thing.

**WOODS:** Yeah.

**HORTON:** But yeah, no, look, it's just a lie. It's just a slogan. It doesn't mean anything. The greatest state sponsors of terrorism in the world are the U.S.A. and Saudi Arabia. And then behind us, there's Israel, Turkey, and Qatar.

**WOODS:** Don't say "us." It's not us. It's those bastards.

**HORTON:** Well, you know.

**WOODS:** Yeah.

**HORTON:** Yeah. I mean, if you look at what's gone on in Syria all this time in backing the al-Nusra Front, which ended up leading to the rise of the Islamic State after they broke off from al-Qaeda there, that was America and our allies that did that. And then we ended up, as I said, we had to ally with Iran in order to defeat them once it blew back too big in our face with the actual creation of the caliphate. But otherwise, we fight for their allies the Hazaras in Afghanistan, as we have since 2001. Our support for Saleh Yemen for years led to him taking that support and using that to pick a fight with the Houthis. He launched and lost four wars against them, making them more and more powerful all this time. They're the Shiite faction there that's at least friendly with Iran. I've never seen any evidence that Iran's ever given them any weapons at all. It was Obama that armed and trained all the army that's under their control there. So anywhere that's Iran made a gain, it's not because of terrorism; it's because of George W. Bush and Barack Obama doing things for them and doing things against them that backfired.

But if there's some grand Iranian plan to create some Shiite crescent empire in the Middle East, I think it's purely in the imagination of the Americans who are responsible for creating it and see it then as, it can't be their fault. The guys from GIINSA and AEI, I don't know what you're talking about. Iraq War II? Never heard of it. So it must be that, yeah, the ayatollah's trying to take over the world or whatever. But that's just the same as everything. We know that America is the world empire, not Iran. Iran's threat to America is that they're independent from us. They're not an aggressive threat against us or any of our friends.

**WOODS:** All right, Scott, I'm going to let you get rolling, but everybody, check out Scott's book *Fool's Errand*, which I told you about at the beginning of this episode. Book of the year by far for 2017. You've got to read that thing. He's got a site for it, [FoolsErrand.us](http://FoolsErrand.us). Check out the Libertarian Institute —

**HORTON:** Hey, by the way, if this —

**WOODS:** Oh, yeah. If this gets out in time? I don't know if it'll be out in time, but tell them anyway.

**HORTON:** All right, yeah, in case this is out in time, I'm basically doing a course, a talk, a presentation thingamajig tonight for Renegade University.

**WOODS:** Tonight being January 3rd, 2018, just for everybody listening.

**HORTON:** Right, Wednesday, the 3rd. And it's at 8:30 Eastern Time, 5:30 Pacific, "Afghanistan: America's Longest Foreign War."

**WOODS:** How do they get there?

**HORTON:** [ThaddeusRussell.com/courses](http://ThaddeusRussell.com/courses).

**WOODS:** Awesome. Okay, everybody, check that out as well. We'll have all the links for Scott, whom you should be donating to, by the way, over at [TomWoods.com/1067](http://TomWoods.com/1067). I send Scott — I mean, Scott's a friend of mine. I still send him money. There's no awkwardness there. It's that



he's doing really important work and he deserves to be supported, and I hope you guys will agree with me. We'll have all the links, [ScottHorton.org](http://ScottHorton.org), everything, Libertarian Institute. It will all be up at [TomWoods.com/1067](http://TomWoods.com/1067). Scott, you can get rolling now. Thanks so much for your time.

**HORTON:** Thank you very much, my friend.